

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

# WEEKLY SUMMARY Special Report

Ethiopian-Somali Rivalry Over French Somaliland

Secret

45 10 March 1967 No. 0280/67B

State Department review completed

### ETHIOPIAN-SOMALI RIVALRY OVER FRENCH SOMALILAND

Voters in French Somaliland will decide on 19 March whether they will stay with France or opt for independence. De Gaulle has stated flatly that, if the referendum goes against the French, they will pull out lock, stock, and barrel. The issue has raised antagonisms between the territory's two major tribes and may bring about a military confrontation between Ethiopia and the Somali Republic. Ethiopia deems it vital to keep the railroad from its capital, Addis Ababa, to the French Somaliland port of Djibouti in friendly hands, while the Somali Republic wants to incorporate all ethnic Somalis within its borders. Paris and Addis Ababa are working hard for a continued French presence, while the Somali Government in Mogadiscio is plumping for a vote for independence. The French have been cautiously optimistic that they can obtain by a small majority a vote for continued ties to France, but a split in the heretofore solidly pro-French Afar tribal community suggests that they may be disappointed.

#### Why The Referendum?

De Gaulle's decision to permit a new referendum in the territory, which has been French for over 100 years, was a direct result of the unexpected demonstrations and violence in Djibouti during his visit there on 25 and 26 August 1966 and similar demonstrations in September.

In the previous referendum, in September 1958, the territory had voted by a solid 74 percent majority to remain French. Most of the population--variously characterized by visitors as "somnolent," "torpid," or "seized with narcolepsy"--appeared content with the French subsidies and protection, with the increas-

ing social welfare services, and with the growing prosperity stimulated by the developing port of Djibouti. Nationalist sentiment seemed to have largely died out with the death of the Somali firebrand Mohamed Harbi in 1960.

The demonstrations indicated that the discontent was centered in the minority Somali population. The majority Afar people are traditionally antagonistic to the Somalis, and in return for official favors and preferential treatment have been overwhelmingly pro-French. The Afars, who inhabit the rural areas outside Djibouti, are mostly nomadic herdsmen, while the more politically conscious Somalis dominate the port city. The basic impetus



Rioting in Djibouti during De Gaulle's visit in August 1966. for the outbreaks was provided by festering Somali discontent with the French policy of coddling the Afars and with Afar domination of local institutions since 1963. The theme of Somali independence was also clearly evident in the demonstrations, where it was pushed primarily by the Somali Popular Movement Party (PMP).

France was quick to accuse Somali Republic leaders of inciting their kinsmen, although there was little overt evidence of their involvement.

In a speech to the local Territorial Assembly on 25 August, De Gaulle had dismissed the "present show of agitation as not enough to demonstrate the democratic will of the territory." However, after the demonstrations were renewed in September he agreed to permit a new referendum on the territory's association with France.

De Gaulle sternly warned the inhabitants that a "no" vote-- against continued association with France and for independence-- would result in France's with-drawal of its representatives, its aid, and its military forces. It soon became clear, however, that Paris was going to try hard to stay and to make a "yes" vote as palatable as it could by granting greater local autonomy. Paris changed the French governor, dismissed from his post as Council head the solidly pro-French

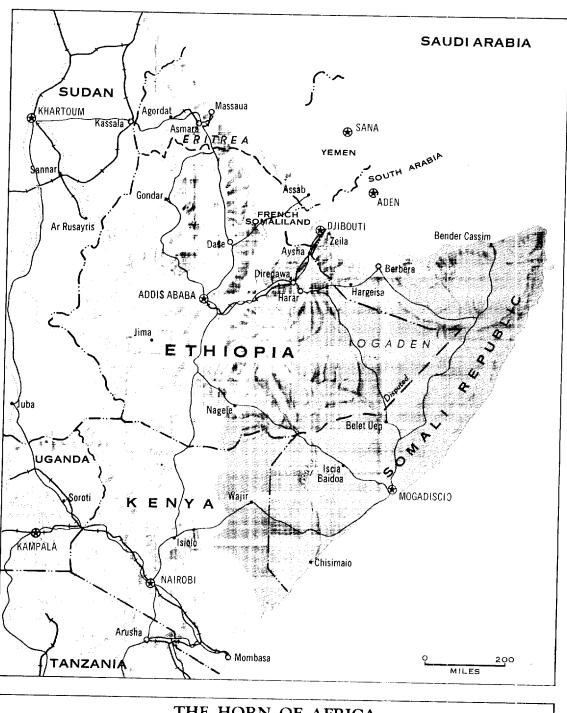
but now tainted Ali Aref, and installed in the Council a more representative coalition of Afars and Somalis headed by the Afar, Mohamed Kamil. The French also began a series of consultations in Djibouti and Paris on the wording of the referendum and on a new statute. At the same time, they arrested fourteen of the independence-minded Somali politicians.

#### The Territory Itself

French Somaliland is one of the world's most inhospitable places--8,900 square miles of desert, salt flats, and rocks. In the entire territory only about 300 acres are cultivated and because of the heat, the saline soil, the blowing sand, and lack of water, there are no real prospects this can be increased. There is not a single fresh-water lake or perennial river in the entire area and Djibouti gets barely five inches of rain per year. There is no industry or manufacturing, and salt is the only mineral resource. Most food and consumer goods must be imported.

Despite all this, approximately 100,000 persons marage to eke out an existence. Some 60,000 live in Djibouti, the only urban area, depending for employment on the port of Djibouti, on the Franco-Ethiopian railway, and on the businesses catering

#### Approved For Release 2006/03/16: CIA-RDP79-00927A005700030005-4



	THE HORN OF AFRICA	
<b>65927</b> 3–67	Area inhabited by Somali people	

to shipping. The rest are nomads who follow the grass with their herds in the Somaliland hinterland and into neighboring Ethiopia and Somalia.

Almost all of Somaliland's exports consist of re-exports of Ethiopian goods processed in Djibouti--totaling about \$2.5 million in 1964. Imports, however, are about ten times greater than exports. This trade gap is partly closed by Djibouti's earnings from services it provides to shipping, but is primarily offset by payments received for handling Ethiopian imports and exports. Djibouti has been developed by the French into a modern port with a good harbor and is beginning to pick up some of the bunkering and ship supply business that once went to Aden.

The 486-mile single-track railroad from Addis Ababa to Djibouti, 63 miles of which is in Somaliland, is Ethiopia's only major rail carrier. Since 1959 ownership has been divided equally between Ethiopia and France, with all of the Ethiopian shares and something over half of the French shares held by the respective governments. Until 1952, when Ethiopia incorporated Eritrea and its ports of Massaua and Assab, the line was Ethiopia's only practical connection to the sea.

Despite the expansion of Assab and Massaua, about half of Ethiopia's foreign trade still moves through Djibouti. It would take at least three years to increase Eritrean port capacity to

take most, if not all, traffic now moving through Djibouti. Mounting Eritrean dissidence may be another long-range reason why Ethiopia would want to hang on to Djibouti.

Although Ethiopia could do without Djibouti, the reverse is not necessarily true. Without earnings from the Ethiopian trade, Somaliland could not carry on even its present low level of domestic economic activity.

French aid to Somaliland takes a variety of forms including development loans, grants, and budget subsidies, but the total is not especially large-perhaps as little as \$1.5 million The largest French annually. commitment to date seems to be the expansion of the port of Djibouti, which is expected to be completed next year. Thus while the economic benefits which accrue to France from its presence in Somaliland are minor, so are the costs of staying.

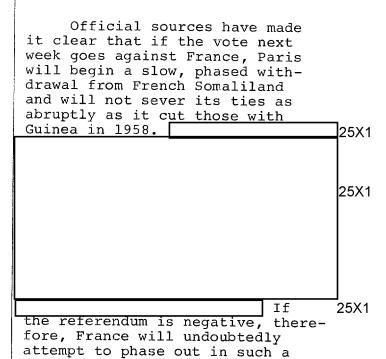
French Somaliland's population includes some 7,500 Europeans, 8,000 to 10,000 Araks, mostly Yemenis and South Arabians, and 1,000 Asians. The native population of some 86,000-90,000 is divided between the majority Afar (or Danakil) tribe, which is related to tribes in Ethiopia, and the minority Somalis. latter are made up of the indigenous Issa Somalis and the socalled "foreign" Somalis, the Ishaaks, who have come into the territory from the northern part of the Somali Republic.

#### French Interests

The principal French interest in French Somaliland appears to be a strategic one. The territory is situated at the junction of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and places France at the "southern door" to the Red Sea and Suez. The territory provides Paris with a good port, with a communications center, and with facilities for French air, army, and naval forces. It serves as an advance base for French activities in the Indian Ocean, as a convenient stop for French planes en route to the Malagasy Republic, Central Africa, and French-speaking Southeast Asia, and as a way station to the Pacific nuclear test sites. Moreover, the scheduled departure of Britain from Aden next year almost certainly increases Djibouti's importance in French eyes, as a last Western outpost in the face of growing Communist and Egyptian penetration of the Red Sea Basin and the Gulf of Aden.

French Somaliland is a convenient parking place for Foreign Legion units which are legally barred from being stationed in France. The permanent 3,500-man garrison in the territory includes a well-equipped and -trained demibrigade of the Foreign Legion supplemented by a battalion of French Army troops (about 700 men), 80 French gendarmes from Metropolitan France, and 200 native gendarmes (mostly Somalis).

There is also a small French naval establishment of about 150 men which operates two coastal minesweepers and some small landing craft, and serves as a minor support base for French warships transiting the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. A French Air Force unit of 500 men operates some 15-20 propeller-driven aircraft for ground support and transport duties.



#### Ethiopia's Interest

Ethiopia's principal interest is in seeing that the terminus of

way as to guarantee Ethiopia's

interests.

its main railroad and principal outlet to the sea does not fall into unfriendly, particularly Somali, hands. Moreover, Soviet economic and military aid to Mogadiscio and the growing Communist and radical Arab advances in the Red Sea Basin generally have made the Emperor even more deeply concerned about Somalia's efforts to detach parts of his empire.

Because of the financial costs and the technical problems of running the port, but most of all because the French Somaliland populace is generally anti-Ethiopian, the Ethiopians have not seriously aspired to control the territory themselves and would much prefer that France remain. The specter of possible independence and a French withdrawal, however, has so agitated Ethiopia that it has been moving fast to The day stake out its claims. after Paris announced there would be a new referendum, Haile Selassie declared in a special press conference that French Somaliland was an "integral part of the Ethiopian empire for historical, ethnic, geographic, and economic reasons" and that Ethiopians would never accept a solution counter to their interests.

The Emperor has left little doubt that Ethiopia would, if it seemed necessary, take over the territory by force. In an interview with a Le Monde correspondent in October he denied that military action by Ethiopia would

be automatic in the event of an independence vote, but said Ethiopia would act should a French departure and external threats-from Somali--lead the people to ask for Ethiopia's protection. He said flatly that the interests of Djibouti and Ethiopia were inseparable and, referring vaguely to a "federation," that the French Somaliland people could only live in association with Ethiopia. He summarily rejected suggestions for partition or for international The Ethiopian prime trusteeship. minister recently told a British diplomatic friend that, if French Somaliland voted for independence, Ethiopia would immediately position troops on the French Somaliland border and would go to the United Nations if troops of the Somali Republic attempted to enter the territory. Whil∈ Ethiopia might bring the issue to the UN, it is questionable if Ithiopia would wait for UN action before moving militarily.

Although there is no hard evidence, US officials in Addis Ababa have long believed that there is some sort of French-Ethiopian understanding regarding an Ethiopian take-over of the territory in the event France is forced to depart.

25X1

SECRET

25X1

#### Somalia's Interest

The Somali Republic's interest in the French territory stems from a national objective-outlined in its constitution -eventually to incorporate all ethnic Somalis (in French Somaliland, Ethiopia, and Kenya) within its border. Mogadiscio undoubtedly feels that if it could absorb the Somalis of French Somaliland it would set a precedent for those in Ethiopia and Kenya. this end, Mogadiscio is pushing hard to get a vote for independence in the territory--which it believes would eventually bring the territory under its control.

On the diplomatic front, Mogadiscio is endeavoring to block any prospects for an Ethiopian military take-over. It has been trying to generate pressures in the African Unity Organization (OAU) and the United Nations for UN supervision of the vote and for either a French or UN guarantee of French Somaliland's independence. Paris, however, has ignored such suggestions. gadiscio has also offered to agree jointly with Addis Ababa to renounce both the use of force in the territory and any action to unite the territory with a neighbor.

Somali Republic leaders have repeatedly warned that they will fight if Ethiopia makes any military moves toward taking over the territory. To back up this threat and to encourage the Somali voters to resist French intimidation, they have moved a military force to Zeila and Hargeisa, nearer the eastern border of French Somaliland. task force consists of five battalions, including infantry, armor, artillery, and antiair-craft, supported by four MIG-17 jet fighters and two AN-24 transport aircraft. Some 3,000 tribal irregulars are reportedly being recruited to support it. The force appears too small to block a determined Ethiopian military move, but its presence sharply increases the possibility of a confrontation.

# Local Politics In French Somaliland

French policy for the past several years has been to favor the Afars and to curb the Somalis. Early attempts to deal with the more nationalist-minded Somalis taught the French to bet instead on the more docile Afar people. They have therefore attempted systematically to maintain the numerical superiority of Afars over Somalis by immigration controls and Afar political domination by careful gerrymandering.

In 1963--after trying two Somali governments--they engineered a solid Afar majority in the local assembly and put in Ali Aref as head of the governing council. Today, they are still banking on the Afars, to vote for a continued French presence.

Local political parties follow the main ethnic divisions, Afar and Somali. The Afars are represented by two parties, the Afar Democratic Rally (RDA) under Ali Aref and the Afar Democratic Union (UDA) under Mohamed Kamil, the present head of the governing There are also two council. parties on the Somali side. Popular Movement Party (PMP) under Mohamed Idriss represents largely Ishaak Somali people--the socalled "foreign Somalis" who came into the territory in recent years from what is now the Somali Republic in hopes of finding work or receiving the benefits of French social services. The other Somali party is the Issa Democratic Union (UDI), which represents the Issa Somalis indigenous both to French Somaliland and to northern Somalia.

The expected general line-up on voting is an Afar vote against independence and a Somali vote for independence, but there are crossovers. Not all Afars are opposed to independence, nor are all Somalis for independence. In fact, until recently, when Somalilanders-even outspoken Somalinationalist leaders such as Idriss of the PMP--spoke of independence, it was almost always an independence still linked to France by financial and defense ties.

Among the Afars, Aref of the RDA views a French withdrawall as unthinkable. Kamil of the JDA, however, has taken a different tack and has been trying to persuade the French to drop the referendum and institute instead step by step moves toward independence within perhaps five years, all with continued French aid and protection. On the Somali side, the PMP, the most militant and pro-Mogadiscio, wants independence and some form of federation with the Somali Republic. The Issa Somali party, the UDI, wants independence too, but is opposed to ties or union with the Somali Republic.

After the French announcement of the referendum, Kamil-now having replaced Aref as head of the governing council-joined his Afar UDA with the Somali parties in a so-called "opposition coordinating committee" to see exactly what the French had in mind for the territory, and what the options were. At that time, apparently no one really believed that De Gaulle would actually pull out completely if the vote was for independence. A series of conferences with the French was held locally and in Paris.

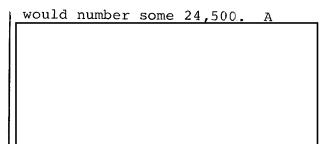
In January, Kamil suddenly announced that he was now satisfied with French promises regarding a new statute--that it would lead to independence--and would vote for continued association with France. Other UDA leaders, however, sharply disagreed with Kamil's interpretation, as did the Somali parties. The Afar UDA

split, with part of it opposing Kamil and coming out for a vote for independence. The four Somali ministers in Kamil's government resigned and several leaders of the Somali UDI defected to the PMP which reiterated that it would support an independence vote. The current line-up is thus a near solid ranking of the Somalis for independence, and a bad split in the heretofore pro-French Afar community.

#### The Vote

The referendum question itself is simple--asking only if the voter wants the territory to remain within the French Republic but with greater local autonomy-and is to be answered "yes" or "no." Part of the local French community will vote, as will resident Arabs, mostly Yemenis.

French officials report that 38,931 voters have been registered: about 11,000 in Djibouti and about 27,000 outside the city. Djibouti is overwhelmingly Somali inhabited, but the 11,000 figure also includes about 2,500 French and Arab voters. 27,000 rural voters are in predominantly Afar country, except for one district where something under 5,000 Issa Somalis are Thus, registered registered. Somali voters would number about 13,500, while the Afar voters plus the Europeans and Arabs



25X1

Theoretically, these figures indicate a solid "yes" vote. If the split among the Afars is not healed, however, the vote could be close, or even an upset. One real problem in estimating the outcome is the unknown degree of control party leaders have over their followers.

#### Dangers

All the political pushing and hauling has brought a sharp rise in ethnic bitterness. This will make it difficult to govern no matter what the outcome. Feelings are running high in Addis Ababa and Mogadiscio as well. Demonstrations against the French, Ethiopians, and Americans—as backers of the Ethiopians—have occurred in Mogadis—cio, and if the vote is a pro-French "yes" there will probably be more.

In French Somaliland itself, if the vote is "yes," there is a very strong likelihood of Somali-instigated riots which could endanger the Afars, the local French

## Approved For Release 2006/03/16 : CIA-RDP79-00927A005700030005-4 $\stackrel{\rm SECRET}{}$

25X1

community, and perhaps even port facilities and the railroad. The militant Somali PMP dominates the city of Djibouti. The railroad runs through Somali-inhabited territory, and crosses some 20 bridges between Djibouti and the Ethiopian border. There has been some indication that the Somalis may initiate demonstrations before the referendum in order to get world attention and a UN supervision of the vote.

A "no" vote would raise the prospect of an Ethiopian military

move, or even a move by the Somali Republic to try to pre-empt the Ethiopians. Any move by France to permit the Ethiopians to move in slowly would be certain to raise a storm in Mogadiscio, and might also precipitate an Ethiopian-Somali clash. The presence of French forces would almost certainly deter any precipitate military move by either claimant, but after a French withdrawal the scramble would be on.

25X1

SECRET

Approved For Release 2006/03/16 : CIA-RDP79-00927A005700030005-4 **Secret** 

## **Secret**